Challenges Encountered by the Students in the Face-to-Face Class Implementation in the Post-COVID Learning Context

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Abstract
More than two years after the closure of schools and learners shifting to distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 28 million Filipino students wearing masks returned to schools nationwide for in-person classes.However, several societal sectors have voiced their concerns about opening limited face-to-face classes. They claimed that the failure of the government to provide the physical and material needs of education and its readiness to implement an effective education recovery plan is still questionable. This paper aims to describe the challenges students encounter in face-to-face classes. A sample size of 255 students enrolled in the four curricular programs in a public junior high school in the Philippines was selected using simple random sampling. Data were collected through a validated researcher-made survey questionnaire. Utilizing descriptive research design, this study found that students disagreed that there were instances that they were unable to follow the new normal classroom rules, such as wearing of face mask at all times, physical distancing, and observance of signages, and learning experience in the limited face-to-face classes is the same in modular distance learning. Similarly, they disagreed thatthe absence of the school canteen and other food stalls inside the school was a challenge/difficulty during the face-to-face classes. It was also concluded that there was no significant difference exists in the students' challenges when grouped according to grade level, the program enrolled, and gender

Keywords: Challenges, COVID, Face-to-face Classes, Learning, Students

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I. INTRODUCTION

Disruptions to education due to the COVID-19 pandemic have brought substantial losses and inequalities in learning. In 2021, the World Bank stated that efforts to provide distance learning modalities are commendable, but this has been a poor substitute for in-person learning. School closures have significantly affected not only the learning of children but also their overall well-being and development.

More than two years after the closure of schools and learners shifting to distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 28 million Filipino students wearing masks returned to schools nationwide for in-person classes. Education Undersecretary EpimacoDensing III said face-to-face classes should push through regardless of the alert level status observed in a specific area with the guidance of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging and Infectious Diseases.

However, several societal sectors have voiced their concerns about opening limited face-to-face classes. They claimed that the failure of the government to provide the physical and material needs of education and its readiness to implement an effective education recovery plan is still questionable.

Distance learning is viewed positively during the covid-19 pandemic. However, face-to-face learning is perceived more positively than distance learning because of certain limitations in the latter modality, such as interactions with the teacher, group work, engagement with classmates, class involvement, and the ability to raise questions about the topics/lessons [5].

On the contrary, going to school is the best public policy tool available to raise skills. While school time can be fun and raise social skills and awareness, from an economic point of view, the primary point of being in school is that it increases a child's ability. Even a relatively short time in school does this; even a relatively short period of missed school will have consequences for skill growth [2].

But because schools were forced to close and learners were ordered to shift to distance learning modalities, pupils faced several challenges as they returned to in-person learning this school year. Opening

school doors after COVID-19 is not enough because students will need continued support to help them adjust and catch up after the pandemic.

Given these circumstances, the researchers aim to examine the challenges and experiences of the students in implementing limited face-to-face classes. The researchers believe that everyone must help schools to provide the needed support and meet the enormous challenges brought about by the resumption of in-person learning.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

School closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic mean that students from diverse backgrounds at risk of increased vulnerability are less likely to receive the support and extra services they need. Closures can also affect students' sense of belonging to schools and their feelings of self-worth – vital elements for inclusion in education [8].

Keeping children out of their classrooms adversely affects their growth and development. Delay in learning recovery can hurt their chances of securing jobs in the future, which is also essential in the country's economic recovery from the effects of COVID-19 [9].

The World Bank noted that school closures had put children's learning, nutrition, mental health, and overall development at risk. Most children have also lost adequate instructional time and may not be ready for lessons after the pandemic. Delivery of child protection services is more difficult, and some students are at risk of never returning to school [11].

Distance learning is not an adequate substitute for in-person learning. Many attributes of in-person learning are vital for an effective education that distance learning simply cannot accommodate. There are too many limitations. Now, students must face many distractions at home and an urge to procrastinate. Learning remotely places pressure and responsibility on students to suddenly have much more self-control. Additionally, the environments of distance versus in-person learning are very different, which prevents distance learning from being an adequate substitute for in-person learning. Without peer collaboration and student engagement, students cannot be expected to learn at the same rate that they would in a school environment [4].

In-person classes lead to organic discussions where students can bounce ideas off one another. For remote classes, by contrast, the on-screen dynamic in which everyone has been thrown is impersonal and largely anonymous. Without in-person interactions with teachers and classmates, some students can struggle to focus during class and refrain from asking questions [7].

While distance learning has numerous advantages, it isn't necessarily the right choice for everyone. Some students may achieve better educational outcomes in a traditional, on-campus setting [6]. Distance learning arrangements seem an effective substitute for in-person learning, at least in an emergency, but not all pupils benefit similarly [12].Students' performance utilizing distance learning was lower than that of students participating in the conventional face-to-face approach [3].

The covid-19 pandemic also negatively influences student engagement and motivation [13]. Because of the Covid pandemic, students are increasingly motivated to enroll in virtual learning environments to reduce potential physical interactions [10].

Face-to-face classes remain a necessity for education. The social aspect of learning where students can interact with their teachers and classmates cannot be fully replaced by distance learning modalities. Because of this, DepEd ordered in-person classes to be intermittent, staggered, or in shifts, with reduced class size to maintain physical distancing and the observance of health and safety standards [1].

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main objective of this study is to describe the challenges of the students in attending face-to-face classes as a basis for developing an action plan.

Specifically, this seeks to answer the following queries:
1. What describes the pupils' profile in terms of:
   1.1 grade level;
   1.2 gender; and
   1.3 program enrolled?
2. What are the challenges encountered by the students in the implementation of face-to-face classes?
3. Is there a significant difference between the challenges encountered by the students in the implementation of face-to-face classes when grouped according to:
   3.1 grade level;
   3.2 gender; and
   3.3 program enrolled?

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design

This study employed the Descriptive Research approach in describing the profile of the students in terms of gender, the program enrolled, and grade level. It also identified the challenges encountered by the respondents relative to the implementation of the face-to-face classes.

Participants and Sampling

A probability sampling technique, specifically simple random sampling, was utilized to identify the participants in this study. Also, a margin of error of .05 was observed. The participants in this study consist of 255 students in a public junior high school in the Philippines enrolled in the four curricular programs, namely: Regular class, Science, Technology, & Engineering (STE), Special Program in Sports (SPS), and Special Program in Arts (SPA).

Research Instrument and Data Collection

After establishing the validity and reliability of the researcher-made questionnaire, approval from the school head was sought. Then, the researchers administered the survey to the students through online means. The research instrument consists of two parts. The first section involved asking the students about their profile, such as gender, grade level, and program enrolled. The second part was comprised of the challenges they encountered while attending face-to-face classes. It consists of 15 items on a 5-point Likert scale.

Data Analysis

In analyzing and interpreting the gathered data, descriptive statistics was employed. To describe the profile of the students, the frequency count, and percentage was used. To identify the challenges encountered by the students, the weighted mean, and standard deviation was employed. To determine the significant difference in the students' challenges when grouped according to grade level, program enrolled, and gender, One-way Analysis of Variance was utilized.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Profile of the Students in terms of Grade Level, Program Enrolled, and Gender

	f	%
Grade Level		
• 7	54	21.18
• 8	45	17.65
• 9	60	23.53
• 10	96	37.65
Total	**255**	**100.00**
Program Enrolled		
• Regular Class	74	29.02
• Science, Technology, & Engineering	105	41.18
• Special Program in Sports	45	17.65
• Special Program in Arts	31	12.16
Total	**255**	**100.00**
Gender		
• Male	104	40.78
• Female	151	59.22
Total	**255**	**100.00**

The profile of the students are shown in Table 1. In terms of grade level, most of the respondents, or 37.65%, were in grade 10 (*f = 96*). In terms of program enrolled, the majority of the respondents, or 41.18%, belong to the Science, Technology, & Engineering program (*f = 105*). In terms of gender, more than half of the respondents, or 59.22%, were females (*f = 151*).

Table 2: Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of Face-to-face Classes

Statements	Weighted Mean	Std. dev.	Descriptive Rating
1. I found difficulty getting along with my classmates and schoolmates because of the social distancing (physical distancing) practice.	2.19	0.954	Disagree
2. I find it hard to cope with the discussion because of the limited time in a week that I am allowed to attend classes.	2.33	1.084	Disagree
3. It costs me more to come to school for face-to-classes than to learn at home	2.40	1.176	Disagree

because I need to pay for a ride in a tricycle/van and other transportation means.			
4. I have a hard time listening to the discussion in the classroom because of my teacher wearing a face mask.	2.30	1.107	Disagree
5. I feel discomfort whenever I am inside the classroom.	2.06	0.944	Disagree
6. The learning experience in the limited face-to-face classes is the same in modular distance learning.	1.95	0.894	Disagree
7. I am hesitant in going to school because I have no adequate supplies of COVID essentials such as face mask and alcohol/sanitizer.	2.07	0.957	Disagree
8. I am not motivated to go to school because some of our teachers are not teaching in the specified schedule.	1.91	0.835	Disagree
9. I have reservations about going to school because of fear of getting contracted the virus since I am not vaccinated.	1.96	0.923	Disagree
10. I have reservations about going to school because of fear of getting contracted the virus even if I am vaccinated.	2.04	0.934	Disagree
11. I have problems in attending face-to-face classes because I am already a working student.	1.74	0.757	Strongly Disagree
12. There are instances that I was unable to follow the new normal classroom rules such as wearing of face mask at all times, physical distancing, and observance of signages (e.g. one-way arrows, entrance, exit).	2.42	1.157	Disagree
13. The time to accommodate my questions and other clarifications about the topic being discussed is limited.	2.38	1.001	Disagree
14. The time given in each subject for in-person classes is not sufficient for me to learn.	2.17	0.926	Disagree
15. I consider the absence of school canteen and other food stalls inside the school as a challenge/difficulty during the face-to-face classes.	2.42	1.236	Disagree
Composite Mean	**2.16**	**Disagree**	

The challenges encountered by the students are presented in Table 2. It is worth to note that the respondents disagreed to all the identified indicators as shown by its composite mean of 2.16.

The results further reveal that the statement "*I have problems in attending face-to-face classes because I am already a working student*" obtained the lowest mean of 1.74, while the statement "*There are instances that I was unable to follow the new normal classroom rules such as wearing of face mask at all times, physical distancing, and observance of signages (e.g. one-way arrows, entrance, exit)*", and "*I consider the absence of school canteen and other food stalls inside the school as a challenge/difficulty during the face-to-face classes*" received the highest mean of 2.42.

**Table 3: Difference in the Challenges Encountered by the Students when
Grouped according to Grade Level, Program Enrolled, and Gender**

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Grade Level	2.074	3	0.691	1.542	0.204
Program Enrolled	0.973	3	0.324	0.716	0.543
Gender	0.483	1	0.483	1.072	0.302

The difference in the challenges encountered by the students when grouped according to grade level, program enrolled, and gender are revealed in Table 3. One-way Analysis of Variance was used to determine the significant difference. As shown, all the computed p-values are greater than the significance level of 0.05. This leads us to conclude that there is no significant difference in the students' challenges when grouped according to grade level, program enrolled, and gender.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study found that most of the students were females, 10th graders, and enrolled in the Science, Engineering, & Technology (STE) program. It was learned that the students were not afraid of contracting the virus while participating in in-person classes. They also disagreed that the learning experience in the limited face-to-face classes is the same in modular distance learning.More so, the absence of school canteen and other food stalls, and getting along with their classmates and schoolmates because of the social distancing (physical distancing) practice were not considered by the students to be challenges in the implementation of face-to-face classes. It was concluded that there was no significant difference in the students' challenges when grouped according to grade level, program enrolled, and gender.

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